



State Senator **NANCY CASSIS** *WORKING FOR YOU*

Taxpayers want transparent, open and effective government

People in Michigan, and nationwide, are concerned about how their government spends their money. Their trust in government has been shaken due to the recent federal bailout of the banks and the stimulus bill subsidized by taxpayers. The lack of accountability in those measures has made the need for transparency greater than ever.

Our new president and his administration has touted the benefits of transparency and already signed executive orders to make the federal process more open. Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox has been a leader on this issue and forged important ground with transparency in his department. Additionally, several states including Texas, Minnesota, Missouri and South Carolina have passed legislation requiring free, searchable Web sites with detailed information about state expenditures.

This is not a partisan issue. Transparency is a good government, taxpayer-friendly policy.

While rewriting the main business tax my fellow lawmakers and I did not have up-to-date information and were unable to verify key data. My experience during that process taught me that if lawmakers don't have access to critical information when writing bills, even well-meaning legislation can be inaccurate or incomplete. Requiring disclosure of this information can help avoid unintended consequences and errors.

To bring sunshine to the decision-making process, I introduced legislation that will bring transparency to Michigan government and the package of bills was recently approved by the State Senate. My bills were modeled after an acclaimed program in the state of Washington.

Senate Bill 70 will require the Department of Treasury to share aggregate tax information by business category with the chair of the Senate Finance Committee, the chair of the House Tax Policy Committee and the directors of the House and Senate fiscal agencies.

SB 71, specifically requires that the Michigan Economic Growth Authority (MEGA) annual reports include specific information, such as the actual number of jobs created by MEGA credit recipients.

Another proposal, SB 72, would require Treasury to create and post on its Web site a database detailing all of the Michigan Business Tax credits available to businesses, how many companies are claiming the credits and how much is claimed annually.

This essential legislation is good public policy that bolsters a system of checks and balances as well as safeguards our companies privacy and confidentiality.

I am heartened as the legislation heads over to the House for consideration, because a group of 25 House Republicans recently joined Minority Leader Kevin Elsenheimer and the attorney general at a press conference expressing their support of government transparency. House members from both parties pledged to make transparency a cornerstone of the new term and that is promising news.

Committed to addressing Michigan's foreclosure crisis

My resolve to address our state's alarming foreclosure rate has never been stronger. Recently, the Senate Banking and Financial Institutions Committee, of which I am a member, heard from the Filene Research Institute and the Rochester Institute of Technology on how to reduce foreclosures.

The research team identified major factors that have contributed to the rise of mortgage foreclosures and recommended 10 policy changes that could help decrease the foreclosure rate. The report is a valuable guide for policymakers working to help Michigan families stay in their homes.

The full 56-page report is available at http://filene.org/filestore/section/27/Filene_Michigan_Report_Final2.5.09.pdf.

In addition, I will be reintroducing legislation to allow county registers to calculate a home's redemptive value in an effort to help homeowners keep their homes. I introduced SB 1390 last year with the support of Oakland County Clerk Ruth Johnson. The measure was approved by the Senate but died in the House.

Free Property tax assessment appeal pamphlet and Michigan tax guides available

Free copies of the latest Michigan Taxpayer's Guide and a pamphlet on "How to effectively appeal your property tax assessment" are now available through my office.

The 2009 tax guide is designed to help residents prepare their tax forms. This extremely valuable resource informs residents about changes in the tax laws and how the changes may affect them.

The booklet contains information on Michigan's taxes and tax credits and includes a year-long taxpayer's calendar with reference to important tax dates and filing deadlines. Also inside are copies of the most commonly used tax forms, as well as addresses and phone numbers for obtaining state agency tax information assistance.

With the changing values in the housing market, many homeowners have questioned their recent property tax assessment and want to know how to reduce it. Timing is critical, since assessment appeals must be presented to the Board of Review in March. The available pamphlet is designed to guide concerned residents through the steps necessary to effectively appeal their assessment.

The assessment appeal guide includes an eight-step outline, a sample letter and the contact information for assessors in the 15th Senate District.

For free copies of the tax guides or the property tax assessment appeal guide please visit my Web site at www.SenatorNancyCassis.com and click on "Publications." You may also contact my office toll free at 1-888-38-NANCY to have a copy mailed to you.

Contact Information:

The E-News Update by Senator Nancy Cassis is designed to provide residents and organizations with a periodic update of my activity in Lansing. If you have any questions or do not wish to receive this e-mail, please contact my office.

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